

Prevent Dog Bites This Spring

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NATIONAL DOG BITE PREVENTION WEEK, MAY 17 – 23, 2015

DOVER – Warmer weather means more time outside and, potentially, more exposure to pets or unknown dogs. The Division of Public Health Office of Animal Welfare recognizes National Dog Bite Prevention Week, May 17-23, 2015, by urging dog owners to consider a few simple steps to prevent injury. According to a 10-year study in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, nearly half of all fatal dog attacks involve young children, and a staggering 84 percent of dogs involved in attacks are unneutered. In addition, dog mismanagement, such as allowing dogs to repeatedly run loose or keeping the dog isolated from usual human contact, is a strong indicator of the dog's likelihood to attack.

To prevent dog bites:

- Spay or neuter your dog. This improves your pet's overall and long-term health, and spayed or neutered animals are less likely to bite. This will also decrease your dog's desire to roam in search of a mate, or fight with other animals.
- Socialize your dog. Dogs that are isolated, such as dogs that live the majority of their life chained or in a kennel, can become territorial and aggressive. Socializing your pet, especially at a young age, can help him or her to feel at ease around people and other animals.
- Teach children how to appropriately approach and handle dogs. Many dog-on-human attacks occur with small children. Don't ever leave a child unattended with a dog, no matter how familiar the dog is with the child. By teaching children not to approach a dog they do not know, and how to properly pet or handle an animal can reduce the risk of a bite.
- Always keep your dog under your control. Obey leash laws. Not only is it illegal in Delaware to let your dog free-roam, it is dangerous for them and for others. Free-roaming dogs can

get into altercations with other animals or unfamiliar people, can be lost, or hit by a car. If you have a fenced-in yard, ensure all gates are properly locked and check for holes under the fence where the dog could escape.

- Remove your pet from stressful situations. Any situation that introduces new sounds, people, and smells your dog is not familiar with can be very stressful. Make sure your pet has a quiet, safe place to retreat to if he or she becomes overwhelmed. If your pet is naturally excitable, confine him or her in a quiet room or area before guests arrive. You could provide him or her with interactive toys, such as treat-filled toys, to reduce boredom.

- Ensure your pet is healthy. Dogs that are hurt or injured can be more aggressive because they don't feel well or are in pain. Have regular check-ups with your veterinarian. Always see a veterinarian if your pet's activity or behavior changes.

If you think a dog may attack, the Office of Animal Welfare recommends that you stand tall and still. "Resist the urge to flail, scream, or run away, as this can increase your likelihood of being attacked," says Enforcement Officer Mark Tobin, Office of Animal Welfare, "You should also avoid eye contact, as he may read this as a challenge." Once you feel as though the dog has lost interest, back away slowly.

If attacked, try to put something between you and the dog. This may be a bag, jacket, or a tree. While he is biting on this object, try to find a collar which you can grab and pull up sharply until he releases. If you fall on the ground, curl into a ball with fingers interlocked behind your neck to protect your neck and ears.

While media reports tend to focus on one breed or another, the reality is that breed is not a common factor in dog attacks. In over 1,500 reported dog bites in Delaware in 2014, more than 80 different breeds and mixed breeds of dogs were represented, of all shapes and sizes. Every dog, regardless of breed, size, or familiarity with the victim, has the

propensity to bite if the right set of circumstances is present.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, drink almost no sugary beverages.

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